

## Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

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USIA-06 HA-05 TRSE-00 COME-00 EB-08 LAB-04 SIL-01

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, RP

SUBJECT: DECEMBER 17 REFERENDUM

REF: (A) MANILA 17706, (B) MANILA 18464

1. SUMMARY. THE MARCOS GOVERNMENT AND THE GUIDED MEDIA CONTINUE TO ATTEMPT TO DRUM UP PUBLIC INTEREST FOR WHAT PROMISES TO BE A SOPORIFIC DECEMBER 17 REFERENDUM ON PRESIDENT MARCOS' TENURE. THE PRESIDENT HAS ADDED A NEW TWIST TO THE REFERENDUM, SAYING A "NO" VOTE WILL MEAN THE IMMEDIATE LIFTING OF MARTIAL LAW AS WELL AS HIS RESIGNATION AS PRESIDENT. PUBLIC DISCUSSION HAS BEEN ENLIVENED BY SPARRING BETWEEN MARCOS AND FORMER PRESIDENT MACAPAGAL OVER WHO IS TO BLAME FOR THE PHILIPPINES' POLITICAL ILLS. END SUMMARY

2. IN A NOVEMBER 26 PRESS INTERVIEW FOLLOWING A SPEECH TO WORLD WAR II VETERANS AT CAMP AGUINALDO, PRESIDENT MARCOS SAID THAT IF A MAJORITY OF THE ELECTORATE VOTES "NO" IN THE REFERENDUM, HE WILL IMMEDIATELY LIFT MARTIAL LAW, CALL FOR AN ELECTION OF THE INTERIM BATASANG PAMBANSA "WITHIN A MONTH", AND STEP DOWN AS PRESIDENT. SEVERAL DAYS LATER, IN SPEECH TO MABUHAY ANG PILIPINAS MOVEMENT (PRO-MARCOS GROUP SET UP TO  
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GENERATE ENTHUSIASM FOR THE PROGRAMS OF THE NEW SOCIETY) READ FOR THE PRESIDENT BY PRESS SECRETARY TATAD, MARCOS EXPANDED ON THIS THEME, SAYING A "YES" VOTE WILL CONSTITUTE A VOTE NOT ONLY IN FAVOR OF HIS CONTINUING AS PRESIDENT BUT ALSO IN FAVOR OF MARTIAL LAW AND THE GOP'S NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANS. SENATOR ARTURO TOLENTINO, A MARCOS LOYALIST, POINTED OUT DECEMBER 1 THAT A "YES" VOTE, HOWEVER, WOULD NOT

PRECLUDE MARCOS FROM LIFTING MARTIAL LAW SHOULD HE DECIDE TO DO SO AFTER THE REFERENDUM.

3. DESPITE GOADING FROM THE MEDIA AND PRO-MARCOS SPOKESMEN, MOST LEADING OPPOSITIONISTS ARE STILL INTENT ON BOYCOTTING REFERENDUM AND AVOIDING PUBLIC DEBATE OF "REFERENDUM ISSUES." FORMER SENATOR SOC RODRIGO ANNOUNCED NOVEMBER 24 THAT HE WOULD BOYCOTT POLLING. SENATOR GERARDO ROXAS, FORMER PRESIDENT OF THE LIBERAL PARTY, BROKE HIS EXTENDED POLITICAL SILENCE DECEMBER 2 BY DENOUNCING MARTIAL LAW AND ADVOCATING BOYCOTT. OTHER PROMINENT OPPOSITIONISTS ARE CERTAIN TO FOLLOW SUIT.

4. PLANS FOR BOYCOTT BROUGHT SHARP CRITICISM FROM SENATOR TOLENTINO. IN TWO SPEECHES AND A TV INTERVIEW, TOLENTINO SAID BOYCOTTS ONLY BETRAY "WEAKNESS OF CHARACTER" AND DESCRIBED REFERENDUM AS "A VERY SIGNIFICANT MILESTONE IN OUR CONSTITUTIONAL HISTORY." TWO LEADING COLUMNISTS, TIMES JOURNAL'S VICENTE TANEDO AND DAILY EXPRESS'S DOROY VALENCIA, AGREED WITH TOLENTINO. TANEDO NOTED THAT WHILE THE RANK AND FILE OF THE OPPOSITION HAVE HAD THE COURAGE TO VOICE THEIR OPINIONS IN PAST REFERENDA BY VOTING AGAINST THE MARCOS GOVERNMENT, THEIR LEADERS HAVE ALWAYS REMAINED ALOOF. TANEDO LABELLED THE PLANNED BOYCOTT AN ACT OF ABSURDITY. VALENCIA WROTE NOVEMBER 26 THAT A BOYCOTT WOULD BE TRAGIC.

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5. THE ONLY MARCOS OPPONENT TO RISE EAGERLY TO CHALLENGE FOR A PUBLIC DEBATE HAS BEEN FORMER PRESIDENT DIOSDADO MACAPAGAL. IN A SPEECH TO THE MANILA LIONS CLUB ON NOVEMBER 24, MACAPAGAL SAID PRESIDENT MARCOS SHOULD RESIGN AND LEAVE THE COUNTRY TO PAVE THE WAY FOR TRULY HONEST ELECTIONS. MACAPAGAL SAID THAT AFTER FIVE YEARS OF AUTHORITARIAN RULE, THE FILIPINO PEOPLE FIND THEMSELVES TRAPPED IN A VICIOUS CIRCLE OF MARTIAL LAW, MUSLIM REBELLION, AND FARCICAL REFERENDA AND POLLS. HE SAID THE DETERIORATING LAW AND ORDER SITUATION WHICH MARCOS USED TO JUSTIFY THE DECLARATION OF MARTIAL LAW WAS A PRODUCT OF SEVEN YEARS OF MARCOS MISRULE. HE SAID THE PRESIDENT MADE A GRAVE ERROR IN ALLOWING FOREIGN NATIONS (I.E. LIBYA) TO INTERVENE IN PHILIPPINE DOMESTIC AFFAIRS AND CALLED THE TRIPOLI AGREEMENT A "GRAVE DISSERVICE TO THE NATION."

6. MARCOS QUICKLY COUNTERED WITH A STATEMENT CARRIED ON THE FRONT PAGES OF ALL THE LOCAL PAPERS ALLEGING THAT MACAPAGAL'S FILING OF THE SABAH CLAIM WAS TO BLAME FOR THE MUSLIM CONFLICT AND THAT MACAPAGAL AND THE LIBERALS ARMED AND SUPPORTED HUKS IN THE 1960'S, PAVING THE WAY FOR THE PRESENT NPA REBELLION. THE FOLLOWING DAY A GROUP OF CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION

DELEGATES LED BY COMELAC COMMISSIONER VENANCIA YANEZA ALLEGED IN A PRESS STATEMENT THAT MACAPAGAL PARTICIPATED IN CONSULTATIONS ON MARTIAL LAW PRIOR TO ITS DECLARATION AND INTERPOSED NO OBJECTIONS.

7. MACAPAGAL HOTLY DENIED THESE CHARGES THE NEXT DAY. ON DECEMBER 1, HE STRUCK BACK. SPEAKING BEFORE A HEAVY TURNOUT AT THE MANILA ROTARY CLUB, MACAPAGAL SAID THERE ARE TWO WAYS TO GET RID OF MARCOS: 1) BY ACCIDENTS OR ASSASSINATION OR 2) BY "HELPING HAND" FROM THE US, WHICH HE CALLED ON TO REMOVE THE MILITARY BASES AND WITHHOLD MILITARY AID. THE LATTER COURSES OF ACTION, HE SAID, WOULD BRING DOWN THE MARCOS GOVERNMENT WITHIN 30 DAYS. MACAPAGAL'S REMARKS RECEIVED SURPRISINGLY ENTHUSIASTIC APPLAUSE. THE TIMES JOURNAL, LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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IN REPORTING MACAPAGAL'S SPEECH ON FRONT PAGE, SAID "WHETHER OR NOT THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION HEEDS MACAPAGAL'S CALL WILL BE KNOWN WHEN AMBASSADOR DAVID NEWSOM SPEAKS BEFORE THE SAME FORUM NEXT WEEK."

8. PRESS COMMENTARY ON THE MARCOS-MACAPAGAL EXCHANGE REINFORCED THE OPPOSITION'S ARGUMENT THAT THEY CAN NEVER WIN A PUBLIC DEBATE UNDER MARTIAL LAW. THE TIMES JOURNAL HAILED THE "DIALOGUE" BETWEEN MARCOS AND MACAPAGAL AS PROOF THAT THE PRESIDENT MEANT EXACTLY WHAT HE SAID WHEN HE ORDERED THAT EXTENSIVE DISCUSSION OF RELEVANT ISSUES BE ALLOWED. VALENCIA NOTED THAT MARCOS SEEMED TO BE GIVING MACAPAGAL A DISPROPORTIONATE AMOUNT OF ATTENTION GIVEN THAT THE FORMER PRESIDENT IS THE WEAKEST POSSIBLE OPPOSITION LEADER. VALENCIA SUGGESTED IT WOULD NOT HURT MARCOS TO BUILD MACAPAGAL UP AS A SYMBOL OF THE OPPOSITION.

9. COMMENT: IMMEDIATE LIFTING OF MARIAL LAW IN EVENT OF "NO" VOTE IS NEW INTERPRETIVE ELEMENT WHICH MARCOS HAS TOSSED IN TO ADD SPICE TO WHAT STILL PROMISES TO BE A BLAND POLLING. THE WORDING OF THE REFERENDUM'S SINGLE QUESTION REMAINS UNCHANGED, HOWEVER, AND NO NEW QUESTIONS HAVE BEEN ADDED.  
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